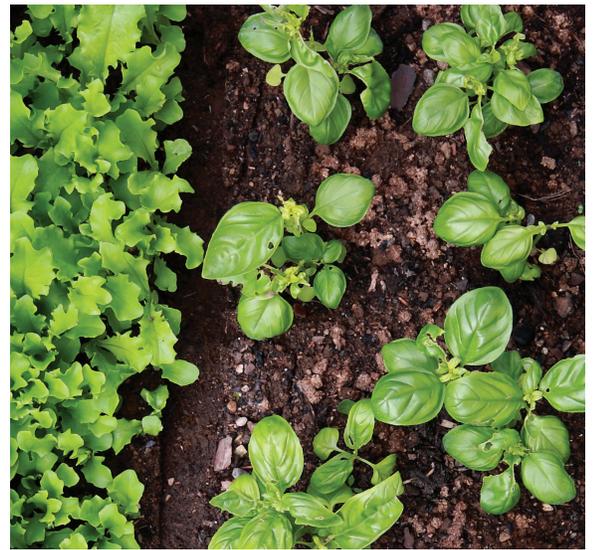


ORGANIC TRADE ASSOCIATION

Farmers Advisory Council

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



The Organic Trade Association's Farmers Advisory Council is a broad coalition between the trade association and organic farming organizations spread across the country and across various farming sectors.



Each organization appoints one producer for each 500 members it represents to serve as its voice in the advisory council's discussions. In addition to the organizational representatives, organic farmer members of the Organic Trade Association may volunteer to participate in the council. Current membership in the Farmers Advisory Council incorporates farmers representing most regions and production systems across the country including dairy, eggs, cotton, grain, produce, beef, and poultry. Most recently, Georgia Organics and Pennsylvania Certified Organic joined the council to expand the reach of the group across the Mid-Atlantic Region and the Southeast. The Organic Trade Association welcomes the new organizations into the fold, and hopes the advisory council's work inspires other organizations to come to the table and weigh in on important policy issues facing America's organic farmers.



With 2,557 farmers, **CCOF, Inc. (California Certified Organic Farmers)** is one of the larger organizations in the Farmers Advisory Council. Its farmers grow 410 different types of crops and raise 17 different types of livestock throughout the U.S. and Mexico (2,367 and 190 operations, respectively). Its representatives on the council are as varied as CCOF's membership, ranging from the smallest diverse farmers to the larger-scale perennial farmers. Being a part of the Farmers Advisory Council allows CCOF the opportunity to "hear perspectives from diverse types of farmers and regions" and be included in "farmer-to-farmer exchange of ideas on federal policy through the Farm Bill discussions."

The newest member to the Farmers Advisory Council, **Georgia Organics** represents approximately 300 growers throughout the state of Georgia. Its growers produce between 40 and 70 different types of crops, with most of its smaller-scale farmers located closer to Atlanta.



The **Montana Organic Association** is the voice of the Montana organic community. It provides education, information, support, assistance, promotion, and representation for organic producers, processors,

handlers, retailers, consumers, researchers, agricultural service providers, and other interested parties.

The **Organic Egg Farmers of America** is comprised of ten



members, several of whom represent a number of organic egg producers. Primarily located in the Midwest, its members are spread across six states. Being a part of the Farmers Advisory Council "helps us be part of the national dialogue and the many issues that affect organic egg production, directly and indirectly," according to the Organic Egg Farmers of America, adding, "The conversation on international feed and organic integrity affects us directly so we appreciate hearing firsthand information from the Organic Trade Association."



With farmers located in 37 states and Canada, Iceland, Mexico, and Panama, **Oregon Tilth Certified Organic** certifies 849 farm operations domestically and 108 farm operations internationally. Its farmers produce a wide variety of crops and livestock products, and represent all scales of production. Through participating in Farmers Advisory Council calls, Oregon Tilth Certified Organic has been able to engage "in discussion on 'hot topics' facing the organic farming community, such as hydroponics/aquaponics and fraudulent imports." Additionally, participation in the Farmers Advisory Council has allowed it to distribute the "OTA Farm Bill Survey to our farmers, providing the opportunity for input on OTA Farm Bill priorities."

With over 2,000 farmers, **Organic Valley/CROPP Cooperative** is the nation's largest farmer-owned organic cooperative. Located in 36



states, its farmers produce 40% of the organic milk sold in the U.S., as well as eggs, meat (beef, pork, and poultry), produce, and crops. Participation on the advisory council allows Organic Valley to "hear what other organic farmers are dealing with across the nation and in different crops/livestock that we're not familiar with at the coop." It is also "useful to have the Farmers Advisory Council help redefine or shape how we communicate about the priorities we as the association have determined."



Joining in 2017, **Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO)** is one of the newer organizations on the Farmers Advisory Council. PCO represents 1,103 farmers throughout the Eastern part of the U.S. (DC, DE, IN, MA, MD, ME, NC, NJ, NY, OH, PA, VA, VT). PCO's farmers grow all types of field crops (such as hay, pasture, corn, soybeans, and small grains), produce (various varieties of vegetables and fruit), herbs, tree fruits, forest botanicals (ginseng, black cohosh, goldenseal),

wild crops (ramps, nettles, watercress, wild oregano), and more. Additionally, its farmers raise dairy cattle, beef cattle, pullets, layers, broilers, turkey, ducks, sheep, goats, and swine. Being a part of the Farmers Advisory Council has allowed PCO farmers' perspectives to be elevated into the Organic Trade Association's policy work through weighing in on items such as Farm Bill priorities. Additionally, participating on the advisory council gives PCO the ability to be "aware of the issues facing farmers around the country and how those issues can evolve into a position or other action taken by the Farmers Advisory Council or the Organic Trade Association. It has been unifying to know that often we are facing the same challenges no matter where in the country we are, what we grow or how big our farms are."



Newly created in 2016 when Seattle Tilth, Cascade Harvest Coalition, and Tilth Producers merged, **Tilth Alliance** represents approximately 500 farmers

across the state of Washington. With members in almost every county in Washington, its farmers produce a wide variety of items including specialty crops, livestock, and grains. Tilth Alliance's members have been excited that they have been more involved in the trade association and Farmers Advisory Council, given their presence in the industry.

Working to preserve, protect, and ensure the sustainability and integrity of organic dairy farming across the West, the **Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance** represents 285 dairy producers across most of the western U.S. Its farmers are located in AZ, CA, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, TX, UT, WA, and WY.



WESTERN ORGANIC DAIRY PRODUCERS ALLIANCE

2017: Long Term Thinking & Immediate Needs

The Farmers Advisory Council's 2017 activities consisted of a series of conference calls as well as an in-person summit at the Organic Trade Association's Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. Conference calls allow advisory council members to bring forward the issues their sector or region are facing and discuss with Organic Trade Association policy staff how to elevate these issues into a constructive policy agenda. The calls also allow trade association staff to report back to the groups on relevant and timely developments in national agricultural policy. 2017 was marked with significant national conversations, with a new Administration and the 2018 Farm Bill on the horizon. The organic sector has also struggled with issues of oversupply in the dairy and egg sectors, imports of grain originating from questionable sources, and an ongoing need to continue to clarify and refine the organic regulations so that all organic farmers are operating from a level playing field.

2018 Farm Bill

Much of the council's work this year centered on helping the Organic Trade Association craft its 2018 Farm Bill priorities. Starting with pushing out OTA's Farm Bill survey in the fall of 2017, organizations and representatives on the Farmers Advisory Council were instrumental in garnering feedback from organic producers on which Farm Bill authorized programs needed support and refinement. **Organic farmers across the nation and supply chain were clear that the 2018 Farm Bill must be strong for organic in three main areas:**

- **Rural Development & Risk Management**
- **Compliance and enforcement with an emphasis on trade oversight**
- **Organic Research**

The resulting Farm Bill priorities drawn up by the Organic Trade Association reflect the input and consideration that advisory council members contributed to the process. With direct feedback from organic farmers themselves, the Farm Bill platform developed from these priorities is grounded in the knowledge that these changes to the Farm Bill will support existing organic producers and make organic more attractive for farmers looking at organic as an option. There is strong consensus amongst FAC members, with the following officially endorsing OTA's Farm Bill priorities: CCOF, Inc., Georgia Organics, Montana Organic Association, Organic Egg Farmers of America, Oregon Tilth Certified Organic, Organic Valley/Cropp Cooperative, Pennsylvania Certified Organic, and Tilth Alliance. Council members will champion these policy recommendations at a farmer fly-in to Washington, D.C., in the Fall of 2017.

Organic Integrity and Regulations

Farmers Advisory Council members also brought forward ongoing issues with regulations and enforcement within the organic tent. A common theme is that in order for organic farmers to remain successful and profitable, the organic regulations must provide a level playing field for all organic producers.

- Livestock and poultry producers on the Farmers Advisory Council were instrumental in the trade association's leadership role to push USDA to finalize the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices regulation. These members helped collect signatures from over 330 organic livestock and poultry producers to a sign-on letter urging the new Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue, to follow through on over a decade of work by stakeholders, the National Organic Standards Board, and the National Organic Program to allow this regulation to become final. The organic sector still awaits a final decision by USDA on this important rule.

- A massive rise in imported grain originating from questionable sources has reduced the prices that U.S. organic grain farmers are seeing for their crops and raised serious questions about fraud in the marketplace. Farmer Advisory Council members were quick to point to areas in the supply chain that needed tighter controls and provided constructive suggestions that the Organic Trade Association can champion for supporting USDA's oversight capacity so that domestic farmers do not need to compete with fraudulently labeled products.
- The compatibility of hydroponics with organic production remains a hot-button issue for the organic sector with strong opinions on both sides of the coin. The Farmers Advisory Council provided a forum for candid and constructive conversations on how to move the industry past this controversy and into a discussion about compromise and ensuring that organic integrity remains paramount as farming systems modernize and innovate. The council's discussion on this issue helps shape OTA's comments to the National Organic Standards Board as it wrestles with striking the right balance between safeguarding organic principles and welcoming new types of production into organic.

Organic Trade Association Sector Councils

OTA's Councils provide ongoing opportunities for networking, leadership development, and education. They communicate sector issues, ideas, and concerns to OTA staff and Board. Submit a Sector Council application online at OTA.com after you've met these basic requirements:

- Identify at least 7 OTA members committed to participating in our Council
- Identify at least 1 member who will act as the primary contact until officers are elected
- Review the Council Operating Guidelines and agree to operate within the outlined requirements if the request for establishment is approved

The Organic Trade Association's Farmers Advisory Council was co-chaired by Perry Clutts, the OTA 2016-2017 Board of Directors Farmer Seat holder, and Melody Meyer, Community Relations Committee Chair. FAC is supported by Nate Lewis, OTA's Farm Policy Director.

Looking Forward to 2018

Even though many crops have yet to be harvested this year, the Farmers Advisory Council is already designing its work plan for 2018. The group will kick off with an organic farmer fly-in to D.C. for championing the Organic Trade Association's Farm Bill priorities. At this fly-in, council members will meet with Congressional Agriculture Committee members, USDA officials, and aides in the White House to ensure organic has a seat at the table for the 2018 Farm Bill, and that organic standards development and enforcement remain a priority for the Executive Branch.

The Farmers Advisory Council is also in the planning phase for a series of listening sessions to occur at each of its member organizations' annual conferences. These series of listening sessions will be designed to engage each organization's unique membership demographic and structure. This will elevate the Farmers Advisory Council's role in facilitating dialogue between America's organic farmers and policy decisions made in Washington, D.C.



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